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Chairman: Mr. Prendergast (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Jamaica)

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In the absence of Mr. Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Prendergast (Jamaica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 94: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*) (A/53/25, A/53/96, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/156-S/1998/78, A/53/165-S/1998/601, A/53/371-S/1998/848, A/53/416, A/53/425, A/53/487)

(a) Implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations conference on environment and development, including the outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (*continued*) (A/53/477)

1. **Mr. Azaiez** (Tunisia), associating his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that progress had been made since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development regarding sustainable development at country level, with conventions entering into force on climate change, biological diversity and desertification. However, the targets that had been set were still far from being achieved. Environmental degradation continued, and poverty remained a cause of great concern. The situation regarding consumption, production, and the emission of pollutants and toxic substances was still not consistent with a regime of sustainable development.

2. There was still a need for coherence in policies between various instruments in the field of the environment and development at both inter-agency and intergovernmental levels. The United Nations review of progress achieved in implementing the Agenda 21 conventions had frequently suffered from lack of coherence, and would gain in efficiency if an overall and complementary approach were adopted. The need for harmonization in approaching the review had been emphasized by the General Assembly, which had also underlined the importance of coordination at national levels. The Secretary-General, in his report (A/52/280), had invited all United Nations bodies and programmes to strengthen the support they gave to the efforts being made at national level to implement Agenda 21 and to adapt their interventions to the plans, policies and priorities of the Member States.

3. Since the Rio conference, Tunisia had strengthened its institutional and legal mechanisms in respect of the environment and development: it had established a national commission for sustainable development, had proposed the holding of a regional conference on sustainable development in the Mediterranean and had drawn up a national action programme for the environment and sustainable development for the twenty-first century.

4. Paying tribute to the dynamic and global approach adopted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in developing international environment law, he said his delegation supported its coordinating role but regretted that in discussing the agenda item it had not been possible to read the report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development (A/53/477) in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), as recommended in the former, due to the unavailability of the latter.

5. **Mr. Al-Hitti** (Iraq) welcomed the Secretary-General's report (A/53/477) and the proposals he had made therein with regard to the elements that must be included in any review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development. His country followed with great interest developments in the environmental field, having first-hand knowledge of the direct effects environmental problems could have on the health and well-being of society. The attack carried out against Iraq in 1991 and, in particular, the use by the United States of America and the United Kingdom of weapons containing depleted uranium, had seriously damaged the environment of his country. High-ranking British officials had admitted that such weapons had been used: 88 missiles containing depleted uranium had been launched against Iraq by United Kingdom forces, and United States forces had used many more. *Le Monde Diplomatique* of 10 April 1995 had stated that United States and United Kingdom forces had used 4,000 missiles, or the equivalent of 3,000 tons of depleted uranium, against Iraqi forces.

6. Scientific studies had established beyond any doubt that such widespread use of depleted uranium had had a direct and serious effect on the health of the Iraqi people and its environment. There had been a large increase in the number of cases of cancer, and of leukaemia in particular. Seventy-five per cent of those suffering from leukaemia were children. Many other forms of cancer had appeared, in addition to horrific and previously unknown foetal abnormalities. The widespread use of those internationally proscribed weapons had had no military or moral justification. Rather, it contravened the Charter of the United Nations and the international conventions and treaties outlawing the use of weapons of mass destruction. It also

conflicted with the Allies' claims that the weapons they had used had been conventional and that the war had been "clean". The extensive use of those weapons could be considered as a deliberate act of genocide, since their effects extended well beyond the boundaries of the theatre of war in both time and place. The water, earth and air of Iraq had been polluted, and they represented a continuing threat to the population for many years to come, thereby achieving the apparent goal of the Allies.

7. Iraq considered that the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, having used those internationally proscribed weapons, bore full responsibility for the disastrous consequences. He was confident that the international community would not remain silent in the face of that crime, whereby the people of Iraq had been treated as a testing ground for internationally proscribed weapons.

8. **Mr. Valencia Rodríguez** (Ecuador) thanked the Director of the secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction for having introduced the report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/200 on international cooperation to mitigate the impact of the El Niño phenomenon. Ecuador endorsed all the conclusions and recommendations, and hoped that the United Nations would continue the process leading to full implementation of the mandates embodied in the resolution. The reports confirmed the cyclical and global nature of the El Niño phenomenon, which had caused massive loss of property, a heavy toll in human lives and serious damage to the environment. Its impact in 1998 had proved to be the most severe ever recorded, with estimated losses reaching US$ 14 billion.

9. In November 1998 Ecuador would be hosting the first intergovernmental meeting of experts on the El Niño phenomenon in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 52/200 and in the context of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The meeting, for which support had been expressed by the representatives of Indonesia and Panama on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Rio Group, would provide significant global insights that would assist in the development of an international strategy to prevent, mitigate and redress the negative effects of El Niño.

10. **Ms. Taddei** (San Marino) said that education for sustainable development was a lifelong process embracing many disciplines at all levels and could employ a variety of teaching and learning tools. A sustainable development strategy should include education and public awareness as integral components, and sustainable development issues should be integrated into national school curricula.

11. With regard to changes in production and consumption patterns, developed countries had a definite role to play in promoting the use of goods and services which responded to basic needs and to a better quality of life; such changes would also make it possible to minimize the use of natural resources, toxic materials and the emission of waste and pollutants without jeopardizing the needs of present and future generations. The transfer of cleaner and more efficient production processes, as well as more sustainable patterns of consumption, could be beneficial to all countries. An exchange of ideas on that subject would avoid initiatives being taken by some States which might result in damage to others. The changes in production and consumption patterns should not jeopardize economic growth and sustainable development in other countries, especially the developing countries.

12. Tourism had been San Marino's main growth area in the past 30 years, and her country supported the initiatives taken by the World Tourism Organization; it welcomed all tourism-related projects based on the policy of sustainability, since they would ensure that the economic benefits of tourism development were not offset by damage to the environment and local cultures. The participation of Governments, donor agencies and the private sector in such projects was sought so that the income and jobs generated by tourism development would last for generations to come.

13. **Ms. Pant** (Nepal) said it was disheartening to note that six years after the Rio conference the world was falling far short of achieving the central goal of an environmentally sustainable global economy. Significant environmental problems abounded, which had an adverse impact on the socio-economic fabric of almost all countries in all regions. Although some progress had been made, there was still concern about a future that was constrained by environmental degradation and limited resources, growing poverty and huge gaps in income between rich and poor, which could diminish the worth and dignity of human life and retard sustainable development. Poverty and marginalization had increased for millions of people, and income disparity had increased not only between countries but also within them. Unemployment and social exclusion had worsened in many countries.

14. On a more positive note, the rate of population growth had been declining globally, in large part owing to expanded basic education and health care. There had also been some progress in the social services sector with increasing access to education, decreasing infant mortality and rising life expectancy in most countries, but much remained to be done in terms of providing access to adequate food and basic services, clean water and sanitation, and reducing glaring

inequalities in the distribution of wealth and access to resources. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's commitment to consider undertaking a comprehensive, integrated assessment of progress in the implementation of international conventions arising from the Rio conference in 2002.

15. Nepal, as a least developed and landlocked country, had severely limited resources and was facing grave threats from environmental degradation; it planned to carry out programmes to bring about an improvement in the environment, economic and social conditions and human development. Nepal firmly believed that the eradication of poverty was the essential and only credible basis for sustainable development, especially in the developing countries. Poverty was intrinsically related to environmental and natural resource degradation, and its eradication should receive the highest priority on the international agenda. Poverty eradication was vital to sustainable development, and development aid was vital to poverty eradication. The broader challenge for humanity as it approached the end of the century consisted in integrating environment strategies into national economies. The United Nations system had an indispensable role in supporting countries, particularly the least developed and landlocked countries, in implementing Agenda 21.

16. **Mr. Koech** (Kenya) said his country had undertaken measures to implement Agenda 21 by establishing a national environment action plan as a way of integrating environmental considerations into all sectors of national development programmes. It was also concluding a review of environment-related legislation with a view to enhancing its impact in addressing environmental concerns. Kenya had also introduced environmental studies in its education system, and had taken steps to strengthen institutional capacity in the field of the environment. Kenya had ratified a significant number of environment-related conventions.

17. UNEP had adopted a more decentralized and participatory approach to programme development with the aim of concentrating on key priorities, but it was important to keep in focus the Programme's global responsibilities. Some meetings of UNEP bodies could be held at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, which should also be considered for future secretariats in the field of the environment. It had been pointed out in its biennial report for 1996–1997 that if the Programme's voice was to be loud enough to be heard above "the clamour of unfettered economic growth and globalization" it would need adequate, stable and predictable funding. UNEP had raised additional resources through fund-raising efforts, joint projects, trust funds, counterpart contributions from Governments, the Global Environment Facility and private sources, but there was no substitute for a reliable flow of contributions into the Environment Fund. Many of the initial contributions were tied to specific and highly focused projects, with the risk of distortion to the Programme's agreed priorities if the balance between the two types of funding was not maintained. Too great a reliance on earmarked funds could endanger the Programme's flexibility, and thus its ability to respond to rapid change as well as to increase its administrative responsibilities.

18. Kenya welcomed the elevation of Nairobi to the level of the other United Nations centres at Geneva and Vienna, and as the United Nations proceeded with its reform measures it was imperative for it to ensure maximum and rational use of the existing facilities within the system so as to minimize waste. Kenya was concerned that the facilities at the Nairobi office continued to be underutilized, and hoped that mechanisms would be set in place to ensure that such utilization was comparable with that at Geneva and Vienna. Kenya shared the concerns expressed during the fifth special session of the UNEP Governing Council regarding the large discrepancy in funding from the United Nations regular budget to the Nairobi office compared with that to the offices at Vienna and Geneva.

19. **Mr. Ito** (Japan), referring to the protection of the global climate, said that legally binding targets had made the Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change a turning point in efforts to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. His delegation called for its early implementation through national legislation like the measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which his Government had recently adopted. At the fourth Conference of Parties in Buenos Aires, such issues as domestic measures and international cooperation, emissions trading, joint implementation and a clean development mechanism would be discussed. In order for that Conference to be successful, the participating Ministers must exercise strong political leadership to maintain the momentum from the Kyoto Conference. Attention should be focused on areas of agreement so that maximum results could be achieved in a limited amount of time. Even if differences of opinion should surface, no country should veto a proposal outright without open discussion.

20. On the subject of desertification, Japan had recently deposited its instrument of accession to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and looked forward to active participation in the forthcoming Conference of the Parties in Dakar. As the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction drew to a close, it was the view of his delegation that the adoption of a resolution on the El Niño

phenomenon would be important in helping the spirit of the Decade to survive. Finally, with regard to institutional linkages among the various conventions related to sustainable development, the General Assembly, with its universal membership, could play an important role in defining general policy guidelines to be followed by each Convention. That issue was closely related to the role of UNEP, however, and it might be more appropriate to discuss it in the context of the reports of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements and of the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements.

21. **Mr. Zvachula** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that climate change was of concern to his country, a small island developing State, because a sea level rise would place the low-lying coastal areas, with the most fertile soil to feed its population, at immediate risk. The legally binding commitments in the Kyoto Protocol were a significant first step towards ensuring effective global action to combat climate change. The Framework Convention obliged the developed country parties to take the lead in combating the adverse effects of climate change. His delegation hoped for further substantial progress at the forthcoming Conference of the Parties in establishing rules for international implementation mechanisms, particularly emissions trading, the clean development mechanism and joint implementation. An effective global response would require active cooperation by all countries, taking into account their common and differentiated responsibilities and their respective capabilities.

22. His delegation noted with gratitude that the Kyoto protocol had recognized the importance of the needs of small island States. It attached great significance to the adoption of a vulnerability index and its inclusion among the criteria for determining least developed country status and eligibility for concessional aid. Vulnerability was among the main obstacles to the sustainable development of small island developing States. The 1999 special session of the General Assembly to review the Barbados Plan of Action represented an important opportunity which must be used to the fullest advantage.

23. **Ms. Narangua** (Mongolia) said that a sound environment was an essential component of development and a factor in production and competitiveness, determining the long-term pace and quality of economic growth. Cross-border pollution, the protection of international waters, the handling of dangerous wastes, and bilateral and multilateral aid all illustrated the global dimension of the relationship between the environment and development. Most environmental problems had their origins in the development process or in its failures, and only through better management of the process could those problems be solved.

24. As a clear manifestation of its support for the concepts of the Earth Summit, Mongolia had elaborated its own Agenda 21, despite a painful period of transition to democracy and a market economy. The impact of global climate change on Mongolia was evident: the overall temperature had increased by 0.7° over the past 50 years, with droughts occurring every two to three years and the water level of the large rivers dropping by 20 to 30 per cent.

25. Sustainable development required increased investment and financial resources. The international community should therefore promote an open international trading system to help developing countries gain better access to environmentally sound technology and harmonize the relationship between production and the environment. In addition, reversing the decline in official development assistance, along with integrating developing countries into the global economy, would help to make the environment safer.

26. In conclusion, Mongolia believed that the entry into force of the conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification was a remarkable achievement that should be followed up by their full-scale implementation.

27. **Mr. Matute** (Peru) said that less than a decade earlier, his Government had perceived the El Niño phenomenon as peculiar to the Pacific coast of South America; it was therefore pleased that the United Nations had recognized its global nature and its effects on many countries in almost every continent. The report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/53/487) provided information on the intergovernmental meeting of experts to be held in Ecuador, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/200. Peru would also host an intergovernmental meeting in 1999 that would take an integral approach to the phenomenon by dealing with its scientific, technical, social and political aspects. The participation of decision makers would ensure that the conclusions and recommendations adopted at those meetings would be implemented in the short term. The desired outcome of those meetings would be sound scientific and technical knowledge of the phenomenon that would enable appropriate measures to be taken in order to prevent the suffering of millions of people worldwide and damage to infrastructure which would delay plans for development.

28. **Ms. Hamman** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that, with its mandate to work in low-income food-deficit countries, WFP helped poor and vulnerable communities,

most of which were living on the margins of subsistence, to improve the conservation of their resource base and hence to sustain their source of livelihood. WFP recognized that people, especially poor women, were the key to all sustainable development. The Programme was currently undertaking a wide range of field-level activities, many of which directly corresponded to the priorities set out in Agenda 21, and it supported some 85 projects in the area of natural resource management. Total commitments in 1997 amounted to $900 million, representing the single largest investment within the entire United Nations system.

29. Large-scale relief and development operations must be subjected to an environmental impact/risk analysis from the earliest stages of the programming cycle. Experience had confirmed that short-term emergency situations often posed special risks for fragile environments. The influx of displaced refugee populations caused pressures which could rapidly deplete the resource base of the host population. For example, deforestation was often intensified as ever-larger numbers of people went in search of fuelwood. In recognition of the risks posed by relief operations, the new WFP environmental policy included specific measures to supply quick-cooking food and to design food baskets which minimized the need for cooking fuel.

30. Since 1997, the exceptionally heavy rains associated with El Niño had caused extensive damage to food production and distribution in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In response to the crisis, WFP was feeding 19 million people in Bangladesh and had launched its first emergency relief operation in China to meet the needs of over five million flood victims. It was also conducting operations in southern Somalia and northern Kenya.

31. Worldwide emergency food requirements had risen sharply, while abnormal weather patterns had severely affected food production in many African, Asian and Latin American countries. In response, WFP had recently launched large operations in the Sahel, Zambia, Cuba and Indonesia. It had also established a global task force to ensure a coherent and coordinated response to the threat posed by the El Niño phenomenon to the poorest and most food-insecure population groups. Vulnerability assessment mapping and logistics capacity assessments were used to ensure a timely response that preserved livelihoods.

32. **Mr. Ri Kwang Nam** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation took exception to the wrongful reference made by the South Korean representative in his remarks at the previous meeting, to Korea as meaning all of the Korean peninsula. His delegation had previously advised the delegation of South Korea to use the name of the entity to which it was referring as registered with the United Nations. However, the South Korean delegation had once again made a wrongful reference in its remarks.

33. The reference to "Korea" was an attempt to create a false impression that South Korea represented the entire Korean peninsula in the United Nations, which could only be interpreted as a provocation against and gross violation of the sovereign rights of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. That arrogant attempt was in violation of General Assembly resolution 46/1 and also ran counter to common sense and courtesy. Moreover, the South Korean representative had not hesitated to call his regime the "Korean Government", which undermined the prestige of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

34. Therefore, his delegation demanded an immediate apology for the abuse of the word "Korea" and the assurance that the provocation would not recur. Such immoral and provocative acts on the part of South Korea in pursuit of its political aims should no longer be tolerated.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.